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Prove it! Toolkit

Overview of Methodology

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Using the *Prove It! Toolkit*

The *Prove It! Toolkit* has been designed either to complement the original *Prove it!* handbook or as a stand-alone, first-step approach to measurement. Crucially it allows you to look beyond the easy-to-count outputs such as numbers of participants involved or the number of trees planted to the real changes that matter for people and communities. It provides a range of exercises and materials in PDF, MS Word and MS Excel files to support you, as project manager, as you facilitate the involvement of project participants and beneficiaries in shaping the planning, evaluation (and where appropriate, self-evaluation) of a small-scale community project. Box 1 provides a summary of the elements of the *Toolkit*.

Box 1. Elements of the Prove It! Toolkit

An evaluation can be planned, delivered, and data collected using a combination of the following tools from the *Prove It! Toolkit.*

- A **Project Storyboard** which serves as a template for understanding how a project's intended activities will lead to change, and what that change will look like. (This should be used as close to the start of the project as possible, so that subsequent evaluation activity can be planned and incorporated into the project's delivery.)
- A simple **Survey Questionnaire** to be completed for all (or a sample of) project participants and community members in the life of the project. This should be complete ideally before and after the project work is done to get a sense of the extent to which the project has made a difference.
- A **Project Reflection Workshop** of between 1.5 to 2.5 hours, for up to a dozen people involved or affected by the project where participants gather round an interactive poster, and use it to look back over, and piece together the project's story.
- A **Reporting Template** which helps structure a formal report to funders and other stakeholders.
- An **Evaluation Planning Template** which helps you, as project manager, to identify and plot the key steps in *a Prove It! Toolkit* evaluation.

The methodology follows three steps:

1. Deciding what to measure with a **Storyboard**
2. Collecting information with a **Survey**
3. Looking back on what actually happened with a **Project Reflection** workshop

As project manager, you can pick and choose from the various materials to support your management, measurement and reporting activities throughout the project cycle. In addition, two **supporting documents** have been created to help you with **Evaluation planning** and **Reporting**. The detail on each step is as follows:

Step 1: Storyboard

To track the impact that your work has had, and to know where to begin to look for it, you first need to have a hypothesis, or ‘theory of change’ about how the activities (the inputs) produce particular results (outputs) that in turn help to bring about a change (the outcomes).

The first stage of developing any project is about understanding the hypothesis (the story) for how particular activities address an **identified need** and lead to a particular **outcome**. The first part of the *Prove It! Toolkit* involves a simple four-step exercise for you, as project manager, to use on your own or ideally with project workers and key people (including potential beneficiaries) involved in the project. This sets out the hypothesis for how the project will bring about change, and helps identify the ways of knowing (the *indicators*) that will show that the change has happened. It will be particularly useful in terms of learning when looking back over the project to see how things turned out.

The exercise presents an important opportunity to involve a wider group of people in shaping a project from the very start, as well as identifying measures that mean something to the people involved. This is about a project choosing its own monitoring and evaluation framework, rather than having it imposed by a funding organisation. The ideal evaluation framework is designed in partnership with project and funder agreeing the most appropriate measures together.

Step 2: Survey

nef has drafted a simple questionnaire to be used with project participants and members of the wider community. This can be found in the MS Excel file called *Questionnaire Template and Data Entry*. Note that this is not a comprehensive questionnaire, but is meant as a basic template, to which additional questions can be added relevant to what stakeholders themselves identify as important to measure.

To make the survey as simple to administer as possible we have chosen a **Core List** of the most powerful indicators of a project’s impact on social capital and quality of life. For each indicator there are between one and three simple questions to be asked of project participants and members of non-project-participating members of the wider community. The core list of suggested indicators relate to the potential effects of a project on:

1. Frequency of use of the new space or facility
2. Attractiveness of the neighbourhood
3. Levels of community safety
4. People’s inclusion, involvement and trust in local decision-making processes
5. People’s networks and contacts:
    - for achieving change
    - for feeling connected to a community
    - in case of a need for help

To these indicators, you, as project manager, may add further indicators that will be specific to your project.

In addition there are some readymade demographic questions that can help you to establish and report which specific groups of people have been involved or affected by your project.

The current wording and layout of the questions represents how a simple social capital survey could be conducted. We acknowledge that although many overriding aims are similar, every project is different and we have set it up in a way that allows the individual wording of each question to be altered to suit local circumstance.

In addition, this MS Excel file contains linked spreadsheets for entering data collected both before and after a project has been completed. These in turn automatically update a series of graphs so that the data can be viewed and compared easily for a simple analysis.

If you choose to add indicators to the core list, and wish to use them in a questionnaire, we have provided a separate folder called *Additional Question Templates.* This contains blank question templates and corresponding data entry and graph sheets that can be used in conjunction with the main questionnaire. Unless you are comfortable enough with MS Excel to design your own questionnaires, we suggest you produce and print off separately any additional questions you design for your evaluation with the help of the instructions provided in this folder.

Step 3: Project Reflection

This is the last part of data collection for a *Prove it!* evaluation. It is designed so that those who have been involved in the project can look back over the work and reflect on the impacts it has made and the lessons that have been learnt.

It is also the opportunity for someone who has not been directly involved with the project to play the part of ‘auditor’ and check the findings as interpreted by the project managers. This will help explore whether the hypotheses on how the project creates impact stand up in reality, particularly in terms of how delivery of the project has measured up to the original *Storyboard*.

The tool takes the form of an interactive poster that structures a 1½- to 2½-hour meeting. Up to 12 people are selected from the project managers, participants, and a wider community (perhaps from a panel of representatives) and are invited to attend. A facilitator (ideally the outsider playing the part of auditor) uses a set of instructions to guide people through a series of stages that focus on different aspects of the projectõs outputs and outcomes. Traditional evaluation, using indicators before and after a project, is usually best for catching intended outcomes; this workshop is designed to acknowledge these as well as to understand some of the unintended and unexpected consequences of the project, particularly throughout the process of its delivery.

Supporting documents

The *Project Report Template* offers a structure for presenting your findings. As well as a background to the project and an overview of your findings, there is an opportunity here to cut and paste individual graphs from the MS Excel questionnaire document.

The last document in the *Toolkit* is the *Evaluation Planning Template.* This provides an overview of the main stages of the *Prove It!* methodology. These are set out in a blank table to help you plan what happens, when, and what resources and people are needed to carry out each stage effectively and usefully.

Other ways of gathering information[1]

Clearly no one source of information should be relied upon to tell the complete story of a project. There will always be biases, and local factors that affect the way people respond to questions in particular situations. When deciding whether or not to carry out a survey using the *Prove It!* questionnaire, it is important to consider if completing questionnaires or taking part in formal interviews is the most appropriate method to engage with those affected by a particular type of project; for example a community arts project for young people or a gardening project for people with learning difficulties. To this end it is always advisable to have a number of additional information-gathering exercises to draw on in order to help ðtriangulateô the findings (literally, to look at them from a number of different perspectives). This section provides some suggestions.

The choice of survey techniques is likely to depend on which groups of people are involved in or affected by the project. Table 1 provides some detail about different surveying techniques and how you can use them.

Table 1: Ways of asking questions[2]

What it is	How you do it	Benefits	Limitations
Participatory appraisal	*Participatory appraisal* is a broad empowerment approach that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action. It uses a lot of visual methods, making it especially useful for participants who find other methods of participation intimidating or complicated.[3] These are facilitated processes involving a group of beneficiaries in which members of the group interact, and use visually-based data collection tools to express their opinions and thoughts.	▪ Very useful in answering questions of how and why ▪ Mutual learning environment can help build ▪ stakeholdersô capacity ▪ Able to capture a diversity of perceptions ▪ Ability to understand complex processes ▪ Good for a general impression of progress or ▪ outcomes ▪ Ability to capture negative or unintended ▪ consequences ▪ Can help to identify and articulate peopleõs felt ▪ needs	▪ Opinions of those in the group may not represent those of others ▪ Not very easy to analyse information rigorously ▪ Can be costly ▪ Requires specialised facilitation and knowledge of appropriate methods to engage people A commonly encountered problem is that as *participatory appraisal* uses very accessible tools, it is often used as an information providing exercise that does not follow through to facilitate decision-making within the community.[4]

[1] For more information on gathering information, visit http://www.proveandimprove.org/new/meaim/gatherinformation.php
[2] Adapted from *Proving & Improving – A quality & impact toolkit for social enterprise* (**nef:** London) Available at http://www.proveandimprove.org/new/meaim/documents/CompareChart.pdf
[3] http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Participatory+Appraisal
[4] Ibid.

What it is	How you do it	Benefits	Limitations
	These can include timelines, flowcharts, resource maps, problem ranking, and a variety of other methods depending upon the context, the skills of the participants, and the levels of literacy. For more information see the link to the website in the footnotes.	▪ Enhances organisationôs accountability to its beneficiaries	
Written surveys	Send by post or email. You can create your own questions or adapt questions from Diagnostic tests or pre-made scales.7 Always test first with a small ôpilotô group face-to-face for feedback. Create a database or other way to ôcodeô responses and analyse the results. May need to send different questionnaires to different groups depending upon what applies to their situations. Responses	▪ Cheap to administer ▪ Prove uniform information ▪ Data entry can be simple ▪ Can be anonymous ▪ Can be self-administered ▪ Useful when the thing being measured is well understood .	▪ Low response rate ▪ Responses can be biased by the questions ▪ Questions may not have been understood ▪ Not certain that the intended person filled in the survey ▪ Difficulties interpreting responses ▪ Some people have trouble with written expression or literacy ▪ Canôt check responses with the respondent ▪ Not useful for complex or conceptual issues
Telephone surveys	These combine some of the advantages of written surveys with the personal interaction of in-person interviews.	▪ Relatively low cost ▪ Personal interaction ▪ High response rate ▪ Empathy can motivate a longer/more complete discussion ▪ Can check meaning ▪ Can follow leads ▪ Cheaper than face-to-face ▪ Interviewee can be more relaxed in their own environment ▪ Doesnôt take long to get started ▪ Contact with person is used productively, rather than chasing forms ▪ Can combine open questions with pre-coded ones	▪ Can be difficult to contact people ▪ Some people may not have telephones ▪ Not useful for children ▪ Not useful where interviewee doesnôt speak the same language as you do ▪ Respondents may not be able to have a conversation privately

What it is	How you do it	Benefits	Limitations
On site/street face-to-face survey	Can combine questions with standard answers to more open-ended ones. Best applied when the number of people to interview is relatively small or concentrated in one area. Personal interaction can be helpful, but can also bias the results.	▪ Personalised ▪ In-depth, free responses are possible ▪ Personal connection can help motivate a longer or more complete discussion ▪ Flexible and adaptable ▪ The interviewee can respond to visual cues ▪ Can combine open questions with pre-coded responses	▪ Expensive ▪ Time-consuming ▪ May intimidate some people/groups ▪ Open to manipulation by interviewer ▪ Can be affected by personality conflicts ▪ Requires skilled interviewer ▪ May be difficult to summarise findings ▪ · Difficulties of interviewer travel
Interviews	Interviews are generally structured with a survey so that the interviewee will give their answer to specific questions. Interviews can also be less structured if the thing(s) youôre asking about donôt have recognised answers.	▪ Personalised ▪ In-depth, free response ▪ Empathy can motivate a longer/more complete discussion ▪ Flexible/adaptable ▪ Can give visual cues ▪ Can combine open questions with pre-coded ones	▪ Expensive ▪ Time consuming ▪ May intimidate some individuals or groups ▪ Open to manipulation by the interviewer ▪ Vulnerable to personality conflicts ▪ Required skilled interviewers ▪ Might be difficult to summarise findings ▪ Interviewer travel ô issues of cost or safety
Focus groups	Collect data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. They often help to generate questions but not necessarily definitive answers. Findings need to be compared to a larger survey. The value of a focus group can be strongly affected by the skills of the facilitator.	▪ Group interaction ▪ Group consensus ▪ In-depth discussion ▪ Can be more efficient than one-to-one interviews ▪ Uses less resources than one-to-one feedback ▪ Democratic process where researcher/ observer is outnumbered by participants ▪ Relatively immediate sense of results	▪ Small sample size ▪ Group may not be representative ▪ Responses all depend on one another and group format may create conformity where differences are suppressed ▪ May cause people to feel like they need to ôtake sidesô (polarisation) ▪ People may be manipulated by others in the group ▪ Questions may not be asked the same way each time ▪ Difficult to quantify the results or findings ▪ Not appropriate for some sensitive issues

What it is	How you do it	Benefits	Limitations
Art works, video, film	These can provide evidence of the achievements of a project in a compelling way.	▪ Filming may be relevant for performance based activities ▪ Vivid impression ▪ Creative and artistic ▪ Can be motivating or fun for participants	▪ Expensive ▪ Time consuming ▪ Impression of the project or its outcomes can be affected by the quality of filming and presentation, rather than the quality of the project ▪ Depends on the skills of the viewer in interpreting ▪ Taken alone, inability to enquire of participants

Project diary

Another simple way to capture some of the unintended impacts is to start a Project Diary. This could be done by you, as the project manager, or by any of the project participants. However you choose to structure it, it is more likely to be filled in if it is made simple and quick to complete on a daily or weekly basis throughout the life of the project.

You can keep this diary on paper or electronically. The easiest way to make it into a consistent tool for measuring is to structure it with two or three headings or questions, such as:

- Progress towards goals (Are we nearer to our objectives? Yes/No/Why?)
- Feelings and thoughts (What was the high point of the week? What was the low point?)
- Looking ahead to the next stage (What needs to happen next? By when?)

This may only take five minutes to complete, but over time will produce an interesting picture of the project's path. If project participants are happy to contribute to a general project diary, it may give you useful insights into how they are enjoying the work, whilst at the same time providing an early-warning mechanism for participants who are becoming frustrated or fed up with the way the project is progressing. We recognise that this may prove to be too much of a burden, but may be worth discussing at the start. Certainly if signposts are established throughout the project, people will come to the *Poster Evaluation Session* at the end better prepared, and better able to reflect on the path the project has taken.

Adapting the *Prove It! Toolkit* to fit your needs

While we recommend using the full *Prove It! Toolkit*, we understand that there will be different resources available to a project to undertake evaluation. Each of the elements of the *Toolkit* can be used on its own. The *Project Storyboard* is itself a useful community-engagement tool for planning a project; likewise the *Project Reflection Workshop* can be helpful to bring people together to reflect on practice and experience at any stage of an initiative that has involved different groups of people. If there is the opportunity to use the elements together, here are four suggested ways (levels) in which the *Toolkit* can be used as a unit.

Level 1

- *What do we want to measure?* Effects of the project on outcomes.
- *How?* Using the *Prove It! Project Storyboard* and the *Project Reflection Workshop*
- *When?*
    - *Project Storyboard and Impact Mapping*: At the planning stage of the project, invite potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders to a workshop to establish the projectôs theory of change, and potential ways of knowing that change is happening.
    - *Project Reflection Workshop*: Right after the project is completed and any data on the outcomes have been collected and analysed.
- *Who will be involved?* A small group of up to a dozen people who will have been involved in some aspect of the project (as beneficiaries and/or workers).
- *Who will survey them?* These exercises are to be facilitated by a project manager, or for the *Reflection Workshop*, you could invite someone in who has not been involved closely with the projectôs delivery.
- *Where?* At a venue convenient to the workshop participants.

Level 2

- *What do we want to measure?* Effects of the project on aspects of social capital.
- *How?* Using the *Prove It! Survey* and the *Project Reflection Workshop.*
- *When?*
    - *Survey:* In two rounds ï right at the start of the project and at the end.
    - *Project Reflection Workshop:* Right after the project is completed. This could be done after the second round of surveys is administered.

- *Who will be surveyed?* People who have been directly involved in the project (i.e., the project participants)
- *Who will survey them?* These surveys are to be administered by the project managers.
- *Where?* In the past, project managers have used regularly scheduled meetings to administer these surveys. For instance, you could add the survey to the agenda during consultations or organizational meetings. To collect the second round of surveys, you could organise a Fun day.

Level 3

- *What do we want to measure?* Effects of the project on aspects of social capital.
- *How?* Using the *Prove It! Questionnaire* and the *Project Reflection Workshop.*
- *When?*
    - *Survey:* In two rounds right at the start of the project and at the end.
    - *Project Reflection Workshop:* Right after the project is completed. This could be done right after the second round of surveys is administered.
- *Who will be surveyed?*
    - People who have been directly involved in the project (i.e., the project participants).
    - A (non-random) group members of the wider community.
- *Who will survey them?*
    - If possible participants should be allowed to complete the survey themselves. If there are literacy or learning issues, then the survey can be administered by a project officer, or support worker.
    - The questionnaires to members of the wider community can be administered by volunteers associated or connected to the project.
- *Where?*
    - *For project participants:* In the past, project managers have used regularly scheduled meetings to administer these surveys. For instance, you could add the survey to the agenda during consultations or organizational meetings. To collect the second round of surveys, you could organise a Fun day.
    - *For the wider community:* You could select a busy street corner or a number of streets and invite people to take part in a short interview. (See *Questionnaire Instructions* for how to manage this.) Where there might be security issues it is recommended that these surveys are **not** undertaken on doorsteps or in peoplesôhomes.

Level 4

- *What do we want to measure?* Statistical evidence of the effects of the project on social capital and related quality of life outcomes.
- *How?* Using the *Project Storyboard and Impact Mapping exercise*, the *Prove It! Questionnaire* and the *Project Reflection Poster.*
- *When?*
    - *Project Storyboard and Impact Mapping*: At the planning stage of the project, invite a small group of potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders to a workshop to establish the projectôs theory of change and identify the ways of knowing that change is happening. Add any additional indicators to those already represented in the basic social capital survey, and develop appropriate questions for a survey, using the additional question templates (*Additional Question Templates*) to set up the before and after data entry spreadsheets.
    - *Survey:* In two rounds ï right at the start of the project and at the end.
    - *Project Reflection Workshop:* Right after the project is completed. This poster should be used after the results of the before and after surveys have been tabulated so that findings can be compared.
- *Who will be surveyed?*
    - People who have been directly involved in the project (i.e, the project participants).
    - A random sample of the wider community.
- *Who will survey them?*
    - If possible participants should be allowed to complete the survey themselves. If there are literacy or learning issues then the survey can be administered by a project officer, or support worker.
    - The questionnaires to members of the wider community should be administered by a trained group of surveyors with the support of a survey manager.
- *Where?*
    - *For project participants:* In the past, project managers have used regularly scheduled meetings to administer these surveys. For instance, you could add the survey to the agenda during consultations or organizational meetings. To collect the second round of surveys, you could organise a Fun day.
    - *For the wider community:* While this is the ideal *Prove It!* scenario, conducting this type of survey involves a number of steps in terms of identifying a sample, administering the survey to account for biases (conditions that naturally skew the responses you will be collecting) and

analysis of the responses in a way that findings from the sample can be used to make claims about the wider population. The *Questionnaire Instructions* provides some guidance on this, and in addition **nef consulting** (www.nef-consulting.co.uk) can provide additional support and guidance if required on a consultancy basis.

And finally…

At whatever level you choose to make use of the *Prove It! Toolkit,* the idea is to keep evaluation simple, manageable and possible within the limited resources that small-scale projects have available to them. An approach involving data collection methods that are fun and easy to use can encourage ownership of the project and make it more likely that evaluation becomes part of the culture of an organisation, rather than a burden.

The tools in the *Prove It! Toolkit!* are by no means exclusive or exhaustive. There is a range of other possible ways of identifying outcomes, engaging stakeholders and collecting data that can complement each other; the important point to remember is that there is no one right way of doing things. The processes you choose must be based on what is most suitable for the story you want to tell, and the people you want to involve in telling it.